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INFORMATION

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October 30, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: Assumptions Underlying Vietnamization

We have seen so many Vietnam programs fail after being announced with great fanfare, that I thought I should put before you in summary form my questions about the assumptions underlying Vietnamization. To believe that this course is viable, we must make favorable assumptions about a number of factors, and must believe that Hanoi as well will come to accept them.

U.S. calculations about the success of Vietnamization -- and Hanoi's calculations, in turn, about the success of their strategy -- rely on our respective judgments of:

-- the pace of public opposition in the U.S. to our continuing the fight in any form. (Past experience indicates that Vietnamization will not significantly slow it down.)

-- the ability of the U.S. Government to maintain its own discipline in carrying out this policy. (As public pressures grow, you may face increasing governmental disarray with a growing number of press leaks, etc.)

-- the actual ability of the South Vietnamese Government and armed forces to replace American withdrawals -- both physically and psychologically. (Conclusive evidence is lacking here; this fact in itself, and past experience, argue against optimism.)

-- the degree to which Hanoi's current losses effect its ability to fight later -- i.e., losses of military cadre, political infra-structure, etc. (Again, the evidence is not definitive. Most reports of progress have concerned security gains by U.S. forces -- not a lasting erosion of enemy political strength.)

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-- the ability of the GVN to gain solid political benefit from its current pacification progress. (Again, reports of progress have been largely about security gains behind the U.S. shield.)

Our Vietnamization policy thus rests on a series of favorable assumptions which may not be accurate -- although no one can be certain on the basis of current analyses.

I am asking the Vietnam Special Studies Group to see what can be done to minimize the dangers involved.

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